

HARPSWELL *BULLETIN*

News for Harpswell Residents & Property Owners from the Town Office – December 2006

Town Website: www.harpswell.maine.gov

PUBLIC HEARING, SCHOOL WITHDRAWAL MATTERS, JANUARY 4, 2007, 7:00 p.m.

The Selectmen have scheduled a Public Hearing for Thursday, January 4, 2007, 7:00 p.m. at Harpswell Islands School for the purpose of gathering public comment on school withdrawal matters. As the Selectmen move forward, they want to hear from the public on this important matter. Currently the Selectmen are taking exploratory steps with representatives of M.S.A.D. # 75 to see if there is support for working collaboratively on a legislative strategy that would provide state funding for Harpswell's share of a state-approved capital construction project should that occur in the District.

A petition to terminate the school withdrawal process was submitted to the Town on September 22, 2006. Subsequently, the Town Clerk verified that 277 of the signatures submitted met the requirement of law (10% of voters voting in the 2002 gubernatorial election). Upon the Town Attorney advising that the article was legally valid, the Selectmen unanimously voted to put the citizen-initiated article before the voters at the Annual Town Meeting in March 2007.

At this time, the Selectmen are considering submitting additional articles regarding school matters for voter consideration. One option is to appoint an ad hoc group, not a statutory Withdrawal Committee, to gather and analyze data related to Harpswell's possible withdrawal from the District, its operation of elementary schools and the projected future costs to the Town. Voters may be asked to authorize additional funding to hire an education consultant who could work with the ad hoc group and/or independently gather data and report to the Town.

Because the school issue is of such major import, the Selectmen want to hear from the public—your thoughts, concerns, ideas and opinions. Please mark your calendar and plan to attend the January 4, 2007 Public Hearing to comment on school withdrawal matters.

For a summary of the school withdrawal process, please review the October Bulletin posted on the Town's website (address above). As an update, the Town received a letter from Commissioner of Education Susan Gendron dated October 27 in which she stated an option to the Town would be "to conduct another vote of the citizens based upon the new petition, to determine if there still remains a majority who wish to pursue withdrawal from the district. If the Select Board decides to conduct an initial referendum regarding the second petition before resuming withdrawal discussion, I will grant an extension to include the amount of time necessary....to conduct the referendum plus an additional 60 days, should the vote be in favor of continuing the withdrawal."

FEE CHANGES EFFECTIVE NOVEMBER 1, 2006

The Board of Selectmen increased certain fees effective November 1, 2006 in an effort to have applicants bear a greater portion of the cost of services required as a result of their submissions. Increases occurred with respect to Wharf Applications (from \$75 to \$150), Planning Board applications (from \$25 to \$135) and Board of Appeals applications (from \$60 to \$135). Disposal fees for televisions and computer monitors decreased from \$15 to \$5 and \$10 to \$5 respectively.

MITCHELL FIELD UPDATE

The Mitchell Field Committee is working hard to fulfill its mission to develop a plan for the short- and long-term uses of the Mitchell Field property. In addition to its summer site walks, the Committee has held question and answer sessions all around Town. The latest session was held November 2 at the Orr's Island Library.

There are several new developments with Mitchell Field that should be of interest to Harpswell citizens. First, the Committee has received a \$10,000 Community Development Block Grant from the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development. The monies will be used to help develop a publicly-created Master Plan for Mitchell Field. In addition, a generous Harpswell citizen has graciously donated an additional \$7,000 to the Town to be used for the master planning process. The planning process will begin this winter, so watch for upcoming dates!

Second, encouraging news has been received from the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) about the environment and water availability at the Field. When the Navy conveyed the property to the Town, a very restrictive water pumping rate was imposed. Good results from the ongoing environmental monitoring program on the property have allowed DEP to reconsider this overly-cautious water use limit. This September, at no cost to the Town, the DEP conducted geophysical tests of four water supply wells. Using these tests, a model was created that estimates the amount of water that can be withdrawn in an environmentally-safe manner. Results show that twenty times the current water allowance can be safely withdrawn or pumped. While there is more work to be done, it appears water availability will not be a major issue for future uses of Mitchell Field.

Last, the Selectmen want you to know that Mitchell Field is perfectly safe and available for your enjoyment. You are encouraged to go there, enjoy the scenery and wildlife, play games, ride bikes, walk, ice skate, fly kites, etc. There is no reason for anyone to hesitate to use this wonderful site. The Mitchell Field Master Planning process is about to begin in earnest. As a resident and taxpayer in Harpswell, the Field belongs to you. Please help us plan for its future by participating in upcoming planning sessions.

TOWN BUSINESS DIRECTORY

The Town is interested in promoting small businesses in Town. As part of that effort, the Town is planning to develop a brochure naming all existing business—restaurants, stores, home businesses, builders, etc. and make it available to the public. We are working from various sources to develop an updated list and ask that you contact Deputy Town Administrator Terri Sawyer if you wish to be included. The Town also intends to post the brochure on its website.

SMALL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

The Maine Small Business Development Center (MSBDC) in Bath provides comprehensive business management assistance, training and information services to Maine's small business community. Located at 7 Park Street, the MSBDC is hosted by Coastal Enterprises, Inc. in affiliation with the Mid-Coast Council for Business Development and Planning. If you have questions about small business start-up, management or available resources, please call 443-5790, extension 15 or e-mail wbs@ceimaine.org. Free, confidential one-on-one meetings are available by appointment.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Harbor and Waterfront Committee is looking for two new members to assist them with revising the Harbor and Waterfront Ordinance and creating a Harbor Management Plan. Candidates with commercial fishing experience and/or knowledge of Harpswell waters are encouraged to apply.

MORE INSIGHT INTO THE CPIC PROPOSALS

After voters approved the updated Comprehensive Plan in March 2005, a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee (CPIC) was appointed to develop recommendations that would accomplish stated goals of the Plan. The CPIC has worked diligently on developing proposed ordinance changes for consideration at the March 2007 Town Meeting (See CPIC Report in the October Bulletin). The following comments are provided to stimulate interest and discussion prior to Town Meeting. Selectmen encourage you to become informed, to read the proposals (posted on the Town's website), and to attend the upcoming Public Hearing on January 10, 2007 at Harpswell Islands School, 7:00 p.m. Copies of the proposals are available in the Planning Office where maps are also on display.

Village Districts:

Two stated purposes of the village districts are to promote pedestrian movement and reduce vehicular traffic. The size of the proposed village districts averages several hundred acres. More work will need to be done to make village districts more pedestrian friendly. While the proposed changes to the Subdivision Ordinance in village districts would allow for smaller lot sizes with the remainder of the land to be set aside as common area, the Planning Board will have to play a critical role in assuring that water and septic capacities can be met in the more densely developed areas. Existing water and septic problems should not be exacerbated. Further study of the village districts may be warranted to demonstrate that those districts are capable of supporting denser development.

Rural Districts:

There are two major components that characterize the proposed rural districts. One is the increased road setback requirement along major roadways (Route 123, Route 24, Mountain Road, and Cundy's Harbor Road) from 40 feet to 100 feet. The second is the increased lot size from 40,000 square feet to 80,000. While the increased setback may make all existing structures located within 100 feet of a main road non-conforming, language is being drafted that would enable those structures to be grandfathered and not affected by the proposal. Additionally, the 100-foot setback from main roads could make it very difficult for a property owner to have full use of the property. For example, depending on how deep the lot is, a garden shed may be forced to be located in a less convenient location. The Planning Board would have final authority to make the determination about the most practicable location. New structures would have to be set back 100-feet from the road while retaining a 50-foot buffer of trees between the road and the structure. Non-residential structures (small businesses) or home occupations may lose visibility.

The proposed lot size increase in the rural district from almost one to two acres may dramatically affect the ability of property owners to divide their land as they may have anticipated. To preserve the rural character of these districts, property owners would no longer be able to create a lot less than 80,000 square feet unless it was for a family member. Additionally, under the Town's current Subdivision Ordinance, a 20-acre parcel could allow a subdivision of 10 new homes on 80,000-square foot lots. The new proposal requires 60% of the land to be set aside in open space with the same number of homes (10) being built on the remaining 40% of land. The existing Alternative Lot size option allows half of the land (10 acres) to be put in open space and the remaining 10 acres to be available for up to 17 lots; however, the new proposal limits the subdivision to 10 lots, thereby reducing the number of potential lots.

Property owners should check maps on-line or in the Planning Office to see what district their property would be located in if the village and rural district proposals are approved at the March Town Meeting. Do not hesitate to contact Town Planner Jay Chace at 833-5771, if you have questions or comments.

IMPORTANT DATES

Friday, December 15, 2006, second tax payment for 2006 tax year due

Wednesday, January 4, 2007, 7:00pm, Public Hearing, School Withdrawal, Harpswell Islands School

Wednesday, January 10, 2007, 7:00pm, Public Hearing, CPIC Proposals, Harpswell Islands School

Saturday, January 13, 2007, 9am to 1pm, Rabies Clinic, Harpswell Town Office

Wednesday, January 24, 2007, Nominations papers due for Selectman, Tax Collector, Town Clerk, Treasurer, & S.A.D. # 75 Director (3-year terms) & Road Commissioner (for remaining 2-year term)

ROAD COMMISSIONER UPDATE

The Board of Selectmen recently appointed Robert “Bob” Venard as Road Commissioner after the resignation of Mike Webber in September. Bob is very familiar with this position as he accepted the appointment in 2006 upon the resignation of former Road Commissioner Warren Graybill. The new Road Commissioner can be reached by contacting the Town Office, 833-5771, extension 141. As part of the upcoming salary survey of elected officials (which received approval in November), the Road Commissioner position will be evaluated in terms of its job responsibilities, time commitment, recommended qualifications, pay and benefits.

RECREATION UPDATES

New Cooking Classes in 2007: January 18, Beef and Mushrooms with Sherry and Garlic, Grilled Chorizo and Tapas; February 8, Chocolate Chambord Cheesecake, Chocolate Mousse and Fancy Veggie Garnishes and Hors d’oeuvres; March 27, Brunch with Swedish Hash; and May 2, Free Lunch and Nutrition Lecture. Cooking classes cost \$25. Flyers are available at the Town Office and on-line.

Award Recipients: Selectmen recognized Margot Cundy and Barry O’Neil for their outstanding contributions to Harpswell’s recreation programs. Both exemplify a commitment to volunteerism that Harpswell is so very fortunate to have. Their involvement in recreational opportunities is appreciated.

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